

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

FY 1996 Overview



“We, the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, recognize that our fisheries are a basic and important natural resource and of vital concern to the Indians of this state, and that the conservation of this natural resource is dependent upon effective and progressive management. We further believe that by unity of action, we can best accomplish these things, not only for the benefit of our own people but for all the people of the Pacific Northwest.”

— *Preamble to the Constitution of the
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission*

Introduction

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) was created in 1974 by the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington as a result of the U.S. v. Washington litigation that affirmed fishing rights reserved by the tribes in treaties signed with the federal government in the 1850s.

The commission's role is to assist the tribes in conducting orderly and biologically sound fisheries and to provide member tribes with a single, unified voice on fisheries management and conservation issues. Member tribes are Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Puyallup, James-town S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, Skokomish, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit, Tulalip, Makah, Stillaguamish, Muckle-shoot, Suquamish, Nooksack, Lummi, Quinault and Quileute.

The tribes select commissioners who develop policy and provide direction to NWIFC staff. The commissioners elect a chairman, vice-chairman and treasurer. The commission's executive director supervises the staff that implements the policies and fisheries management activities approved by the commissioners. The NWIFC employs about 50 full-time employees in its Administration, Fishery Services, Habitat Services and Information and Education Services divisions.

The Administration Division includes the executive director, director of finance and administration, fishery and legislative policy analysts and clerical and accounting departments.

The Fishery Services Program supports and promotes the fishery programs of member tribes by providing technical assistance, coordinating management programs and representing tribal management poli-

cies. The program is comprised of the Fishery Management and Planning Division, Quantitative Services Division and Enhancement Services Division, and provides services ranging from harvest management planning to database management and fish health.

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical and policy assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. In addition, the program coordinates tribal participation in forest management processes and conducts a statewide Coordinated Tribal Water Quality Program, among other programs.

The Information and Education Division provides comprehensive public relations services to member tribes. The division produces news releases, publications and videos, works with the media, coordinates and provides public presentations,

develops and staffs educational exhibits at fairs and other events, and responds to numerous information requests from the public, among other activities.

FY 1996 Overview

Fiscal Year 1996 was a year of challenge for western Washington treaty Indian tribes and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

A high priority for commission staff in FY 1996 was continued participation in the joint tribal/state Wild Stock Restoration Initiative and associated long-range planning. Much of the effort centered on development of a joint statewide Wild Salmonid Policy. The policy will address a number of key issues surrounding wild salmonid conservation and management, such as harvest management, genetic conservation and appropriate uses of hatchery programs. The policy will define overall goals and objectives, as well as a set of guidelines for their implementation, and will also provide a consistent framework within which individual stock or watershed recovery plans can be developed.

Efforts also continued to develop recovery plans for salmon and steelhead stocks identified as critical in the 1992 stock inventory, as well as development of a comprehensive coho salmon management strategy and a statewide inventory and assessment of salmonid habitats.

Considerable staff time was dedicated to assisting the National Marine Fisheries Service in its effort to conduct status reviews of regional salmonid populations in response to petitions filed under the Endangered

Species Act. Results of the Wild Stock Restoration Initiative will figure prominently in ESA decision making processes.

The year also heralded a major change in the structure of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife. By referendum, citizens of the state elected to replace the governor-appointed director with a commission composed of citizen representatives with the authority to name the agency's director. As a result, considerable time and effort was required in developing a working relationship with the new commission and a new agency director, as well as educating them about the tribal perspective on important fisheries management issues.

One such issue was the state legislature's mandate to the agency that it mark all of its 1995 coho production. The idea behind the experiment is that the mark (a clipped fin near the tail) would enable sport fishermen to distinguish hatchery fish from wild fish in mixed stock areas such as the north coast and Strait of Juan de Fuca, where large numbers of hatchery and wild fish intermingle before seeking out their stream of origin. Fisheries have been restricted in those areas in recent years to protect weak wild stocks.

The tribes are eager to work together with the state to ensure that the program is implemented properly.

In particular, the tribes want to ensure that the program does not result in a loss of data from the coastwide coded wire tagging program, which utilizes the same fin-clip to designate fish carrying coded wire tags. The tagging program pro-

vides the data that is the foundation of domestic fisheries management in the region, and also is required under the Pacific Salmon Treaty between the U.S. and Canada.

FY 1996

Activities Summary

Following is a summary of activities by the NWIFC during 1996:

Fishery Services

Fishery Management And Planning Division

The primary objective of the Fishery Management Planning Division is to provide technical assistance and coordination to member tribes in their annual and long range fishery management planning activities. Activities during FY 1996 included:

- ❖ Development of preseason fishing agreements;
- ❖ Development of preseason and inseason run size forecasts;
- ❖ Development and participation in stock monitoring programs;
- ❖ Inseason fisheries monitoring;
- ❖ Assistance with data retrieval and analysis;
- ❖ Post season fishery analysis and reporting;
- ❖ U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty technical assistance;

- ❖ Long-range planning/Wild Stock Restoration Initiative
- ❖ Endangered Species Act issues;
- ❖ Pacific Fishery Management Council technical assistance;
- ❖ Shellfish management and technical assistance, such as assisting tribes in developing harvest management plans, setting up shellfish population surveys, analyzing survey and harvest data, and developing and assisting with enhancement projects; and
- ❖ Coastal habitat coordination.
- ❖ Providing computer set-up, maintenance, troubleshooting, and consultation services;
- ❖ Providing statistical consulting services for pre-season abundance forecasts and inseason run size update models;
- ❖ Conducting data analysis of fisheries studies and developing study designs;
- ❖ Updating and evaluating fishery management statistical models and databases; and
- ❖ Coordinating the tribal fisherman identification and boat plaque program.
- ❖ Providing fish health services to tribal hatcheries in the areas of juvenile fish health monitoring, disease diagnostics, adult health inspections and vaccine production;
- ❖ Providing assistance to tribes in the development and implementation of management and harvest plans for marine mammals; and
- ❖ Representing tribal interests before the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty Implementation

The Pacific Salmon Treaty of 1985 provides for tribal policy representation at all levels of the Pacific Salmon Commission, which implements the treaty. NWIFC staff are involved in many aspects of the treaty's implementation. Activities included:

- ❖ Facilitating inter-tribal and inter-agency meetings, developing issue papers and analyzing strategies and negotiation options;
- ❖ Informing tribes and policy representatives on issues affected by the treaty implementation process;
- ❖ Serving on the Fraser sockeye and pink, chum, coho, chinook and data sharing technical committees, as well as other committees, work groups and panels;

Quantitative Services Division

The Quantitative Services Division's objective is to assist tribal fishery management programs by providing relevant data, quantitative tools and analyses, and technical consulting services to tribal and NWIFC projects. Activities in FY 1996 included:

- ❖ Providing assistance to tribal policy and technical staff on evaluation of management for chinook and coho salmon;
- ❖ Administering and coordinating the Treaty Indian Catch Monitoring Program. The program provides an agreed-upon harvest database that can provide hard catch statistics critical for fisheries management planning and allocation;

Enhancement Services Division

The Enhancement Services Division provides tribal support services in enhancement planning, hatchery coordination, coded wire tagging, and fish health. Activities included:

- ❖ Coded wire tagging of 3 million fish at tribal hatcheries to provide information critical to fisheries management;
- ❖ Fulfilling tribal requests for coded wire tag analysis;
- ❖ Hosting fish culture workshops for tribal hatchery technicians;

- ❖ Advising and facilitating development of management regimes by tribal and U.S. Section representatives of the bi-lateral Fraser Panel, which manages fisheries on Fraser River stocks; and
- ❖ Coordinating tribal research and data gathering activities associated with implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Habitat Services Division

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. The division monitors these issues and acts as an information clearinghouse. Activities in FY 1996 included:

- ❖ Coordinating policy and technical level discussions between tribes and federal, state and local governments, and other interested parties;
- ❖ Coordinating, representing and monitoring tribal interests in the Timber/Fish/Wildlife and Water Resources Forum processes, Coordinated Tribal Water Quality and Ambient Monitoring programs, and Puget Sound Water Quality Authority management committees.

- ❖ Monitoring, analyzing and distributing technical information on habitat-related forums, programs and processes; and
- ❖ Implementing the Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Project.

Information and Education Services Division

The Information and Education Services Division provides comprehensive public relations and education services to member tribes. Activities in FY 1996 included:

- ❖ Producing news releases, newsletters, brochures, reports, curriculums, videos, photographs, exhibits and other materials to inform and educate the public about tribal natural resource management activities and objectives;
- ❖ Producing internal newsletters, background papers and other materials to help keep member tribes informed on topics of interest;
- ❖ Coordinating conferences and meetings;

- ❖ Responding to numerous public requests for information on the tribes and tribal natural resource management activities;
- ❖ Participating in cooperative natural resource education efforts and events; and
- ❖ Monitoring legislation and coordinating tribal input.

For More Information

For more information about the natural resource management activities of the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington, contact the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 6730 Martin Way E., Olympia, WA 98515; or call (360) 438-1180. The NWIFC home page is available on the World Wide Web at <http://mako.nwifc.wa.gov>.